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THE
S P I R I T
OF THE
CONSTITUTION
AND THAT OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND,
COMPARED.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED BY ANOTHER HAND,
R E M A R K S
ON
TWO LETTERS,
ADDRESSED TO THE
ELEGATES OF THE SEVERAL CONGREGATIONS
OF
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,
Who met at Devizes, September 14, 1789.

L O N D O N,
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, N° 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,

MDCCXC.
[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

S. P. I. R. I. T.

CONSTITUTION

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

H. M. A. R. I. S.

T. O. L. E. R. A. N. C. E.

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P R E F A C E.

IT must give great satisfaction to all the friends of liberty to perceive that the application to parliament for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts begins to create a great degree of general attention, and that both the friends and the enemies of a *complete toleration* (for that, in reality, is the thing contended for) are making their appeal to the public. This will contribute to excite still more attention, and thereby bring us the sooner to the object at which we all profess to be aiming, viz. a general concurrence of opinion with respect to every thing that is *true* and *right*, and the general prevalence of maxims of government agreeable to them.

The present times are remarkably favourable to *free inquiry*, and consequently to the cause of *truth*, and that of *liberty*, both civil and religious; and the zealous friends of truth and liberty will not neglect to im-

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duty

prove so precious an opportunity. It is our duty to call upon *every man who has ears to hear*, and form his judgment. Let every claim of right, by men and christians, be now produced, and urged; and let the advocates for civil or ecclesiastical tyranny be, if possible, compelled to hear them, and to produce their *strongest reasons* in opposition to them.

It is high time to come to a decision in questions of this moment. As the prophet of old said, *Why halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, serve him; but if Baal then serve him*; if a state of liberty be fit for man, let him enjoy it; if not, let him crouch and submit, without making any more resistance. If men have a natural right to the exercise of their religion, whatever it may be, uncontrouled by civil power, and not subject to any civil penalties or disabilities, let all those who are now oppressed on this account, and held in a state of unjust and disgraceful servitude, rise as one man, and assert their freedom. And if there be any who pretend to a right to impose their opinions upon their fellow men and fellow-christians, and to subject them to any civil penalties for not thinking as they do, let them be called

called upon to *prove* their right to such a prerogative; and if it should appear that they have nothing but *numbers*, or *long prescription*, unsupported by reason or argument, in favour of their pretensions, let such a manifest and impudent usurpation be exposed and exploded, as it ought to be; and let silence be considered as a confession of guilt.

While men are rational beings, it must be sufficient to appeal to their reason, and all prejudice will in time give way before it. Let us then never cease to urge our reasons, and exhibit all our grievances. We shall well deserve to bear any burdens that may be imposed upon us while we make no complaint, and thereby suffer others to imagine that we think ourselves made to bear them, and that we have no cause of complaint.

If our enemies ask us where we mean to stop, let us answer, no where short of the attainment of all our *just rights*, and the termination of their injustice towards us; that we shall think ourselves aggrieved, and have cause for complaint, till the government under which we live shall look with an equal

equal eye upon all who are equally *good subjects*, and till the same laws shall afford equal protection to every man who is equally peaceable and well-behaved, whatever be his opinion and practice in matters of religion, as well as of philosophy. Let every action that affects the peace of society be properly animadverted upon; but where no person is disturbed himself, let him not be permitted to complain of others. In short, let us adhere to the clear distinction laid down by our Saviour, in *giving to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.*

THE
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THE
S P I R I T
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IT is, I believe, little disappointment to the Dissenters that their just claims have again been rejected. The progress of that conviction which interest opposes, and which is urged only by appeals to reason and equity, is always slow; but in return, it is finally sure, in every country where a fair hearing can be obtained for the cause of truth. The Dissenters will probably think *that* almost a triumph, which was so respectable an effort; respectable not only from the near approach to equality in numbers, but much more so from the manifest superiority in fair argument on the side of their supporters. The appellation of *pompous nothings* bestowed on the speech of their principal antagonist appeared to give offence, and was censured as uncandid; yet, surely, if a series of declamation founded

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upon assumption of the main points of the argument can deserve such a title, it was properly applied. That the requisition of the Dissenters was dangerous to the church, and that this danger also involved that of the state, were positions which their friends combated with the greatest force of argument. This speaker, however, adhered to his opinion on the subject, and it has the decided sanction of his authority.

What weight this ought to carry, may be estimated by a few considerations on the public character of the person who on this occasion has again stood forth as the guardian of the nation's laws and director of its counsels. Was it not *He* whose whole public conduct has been dictated by narrow principles and short-sighted policy?—who by way of trying or tricking the Americans, hazarded the kindling a furious flame by the imposition of a paltry tax, as trivial in its product, as unjust and unconstitutional in its principle?—who by advising the insolent rejection of the petition of the American Congress, precipitated the nation into a civil war?—who was so devoid of sagacity, as not to foresee that our ancient enemies would seize this occasion to involve us in a general war?—who, as his own friends assert, contrary to his judgment, persisted in the most ruinous and impolitic plans of administration, merely to keep himself in office; a crime that will bring curses on his head to the latest ages of the British name!—who has always been
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the strenuous opposer of every plan for the melioration of our constitution, adopting for argument the miserable cant of low-minded men in all periods, concerning the dangers of innovation, and the excellence of present institutions? To have such a man for their political enemy, can be no discredit to the Dissenters.

It is not my present purpose to repeat the arguments made use of in and out of parliament in the late debate on the repeal of the test act. I regard it as sufficiently proved, that the Dissenters have a right to what they demanded—that the dangers supposed likely to accrue to the church from a compliance were perfectly chimerical—and that the alliance between church and state is not a natural one, but formed by interested policy to the real detriment of both. I mean to take new ground—openly to carry the attack into the enemy's quarters, and to shew them, that if any denomination of subjects are to be suspected of disaffection to their country, it is themselves. I shall attempt to prove, *that the constitution of the church of England, so far from being, as its panegyrists assert, suited to the constitution of the state, is in its nature entirely different from it, and in its operation adverse to it.*

It will, I suppose, be on all hands admitted, that the essence of the British constitution consists in an assemblage of three distinct parts; each in itself independent, and possessed of a power of controuling the exertions of the others. If in these three parts

one seems to take the lead, as being entrusted with the exercise of the whole executive power, its authority is supposed to be efficaciously balanced by the power of the purse, which is fully in the hands of another. Many will likewise admit into the idea of this constitution, the irresistible, though irregularly exerted sway of the people, watching over, and modifying the energies of all the rest. Now in considering the effect which the ecclesiastical constitution of England may produce upon the civil, it is to be regarded under two heads; one, that which proceeds from the influence of a supposed resemblance of structure, and which may be termed *indirect*; the other, that arising from the *direct* operation of its power and authority.

I. With respect to *similarity of form*, though the upper and lower houses of convocation, with the king at their head, form an apparent model of the constitution in state, yet it will be manifest on the slightest consideration, that this is merely apparent, and that the essential principles of the two are perfectly different. The popular basis of our civil constitution has not the least parallel in the ecclesiastical; for neither in the choice, superintendence, or maintenance of ministers, nor in the passing of ecclesiastical ordinances, have the people any voice whatsoever; and it will not, I presume, be asserted that the *laity* are not a part of the *church* as well as the *clergy*. Then, even the lower house of convocation is in great part not an *elected* body at all, but composed of persons who sit by virtue of offices to which

which they have been appointed by the crown. Farther, the convocation is so far from being independent, that though regularly assembled, it is in the power of the crown to prevent it from performing a single act; and this power has for a long period in reality been exercised, so as to render the very name of convocation almost ridiculous*. The church of England therefore possesses in itself no legislative power whatever; and its executive power is conducted upon principles absolutely different from those of our civil jurisprudence, the mild and equitable spirit of which is so justly our boast — but perfectly similar to those which have prevailed in the most arbitrary countries. How then can a member of such a church, whether layman or clergyman, from *its* constitution derive any ideas of those rights of mankind which are the foundation of all civil liberty? This is enough with respect to the influence of the church as it might serve for a model to the state.

II. The *direct* influence of the ecclesiastical system established among us is a more important consideration. This influence has ever been, as it was designed to be, very great; and it operates, by its doctrines, and by the powers and emoluments it is the instrument of conferring.

That the doctrine of the church of England has ever been that of absolute and unconditional sub-

* "The convocation gaped; but could not speak."

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mission to the ruling powers is, I believe, a circumstance common to it and all other christian churches which have been established by states, and made part of their civil polity. And though such a doctrine may be thought peculiarly inconsistent when applied to a form of government which has been brought to its present improved state by repeated acts of resistance, yet it would in the ordinary course of things be excusable were subscription equally directed to the three branches of the supreme authority, or rather to the combination of all the three. It is true that such a modification of the rule of obedience has been adopted by churchmen in general, especially since the accession of the present royal family; but the public forms of worship, remaining unaltered, still *exclusively* direct the reverence of the people to the king as their sole ruler, and the fountain of all civil authority. Thus, in the usual prayer for his Majesty, God is addressed as "the only ruler of princes" which expression, if it has any appropriate meaning, must imply, that kings are accountable to the Supreme Being alone for the exercise of their office—a sentiment perfectly treasonable to the spirit of our constitution. It may, indeed, be represented as only an echo of the legal maxim "that the king can do no wrong;" but this is allowed only to exclude personal responsibility; whereas the other supposes no human controul of any kind over the sovereign's actions.*

* In the same prayer, the unqualified petition "strengthen him that he may vanquish and overcome *all his enemies*," though I suppose referring only to foreign foes or declared rebels, is yet highly unbecoming

In the communion service, one of the prayers for the king beseeches "that we and all his subjects, duly considering *whose authority he hath*, may faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey him." This authority certainly does not mean *that* conferred on him by his people. Even the prayer for the high court of parliament inculcates no other idea of it than a branch of the king's council; and the king's name is twice brought forwards in it, with epithets and accompaniments studiously employed to fix on it the principal interest. On the language employed in the services for the thirtieth of January and twenty-ninth of May it is needless to comment, as their avowed purpose was to commemorate the inseparable alliance between monarchy and the church; and what *monarchy* was in the notions of churchmen at that time, every one knows. Even in the service for the accession of his present majesty, the leading ideas are those of obedience due to a king, and his connection with the church as its head; and not a tittle appears to intimate *his* subordination to the laws, or the national authority by which his family received the crown. "Give us "grace to obey him chearfully, and willingly for "conscience sake"—"let not heresies and false doctrines disturb the peace of the church, nor schisms "and causeless divisions weaken it, but grant us to "be of one mind in serving thee our God, and "obeying *him* according to thy will."

coming the humility and charity of a christian. Must *he* ever be in the right, and are not the same prayers offered for all other kings?

Thus the language of the church in its public offices is that, not of our *mixed constitution*, but of a *pure monarchy*; and what influence the constant repetition of such expressions must have upon the minds of the unthinking vulgar, may easily be conceived. The effect has ever been, and still continues to be, that every member of the national church, in proportion as he is zealous for its forms and doctrines, and regular in his attendance upon its ordinances, is biased towards the monarchical part of the government, and in it centers that spirit of *loyalty*, which ought to comprehend the whole state, not be monopolized by one who is only its first servant.

Whether the determined opposition to any alteration of the liturgy proceeds from the clergy only, trembling under the apprehension that innovation of any kind would affect their temporal interests, or whether it is also fostered and fomented by the crown and its ministers for ends of their own, I venture not to decide; but certain it is, that a very strong political argument for the necessity of an alteration may be drawn from the consideration of its having been framed under the direction of the Tudors and Stuarts, who were glad to support their exalted ideas of regal prerogative by the powerful aid of religion. Is it in the nature of things possible that sentiments dictated by tyrants and slaves should suit the views and feelings of freemen? If we could not now endure the cant of James in the parliament, why should we be obliged to hear it in the church?

But

But the influence of the doctrines and language of the church, great as it is, is not so exactly assignable, and demonstratively operative, as that proceeding from the advantages of wealth, rank, and title which the crown by means of the church has to bestow. Without ascribing to the clergy a *greater* share of ambition and cupidity than to other men, and the annals of mankind will not allow us to conclude that in any country they have *less*) it is very obvious that, as a body, they must continually have their eyes turned towards the source of their honours and emoluments; and when it is considered, that the king of England has the uncontrouled appointment of twenty-six spiritual lords, who are indebted to him for estate as well as title, together with deans, archdeacons, prebends, canons, and other dignitaries in abundance, besides the disposal of a great number of parochial livings, it cannot for a moment be doubted which way this order will lean in every controversy between the several branches of the legislature. Their favourite adage of "no bishop, no king" though apparently refuted by various facts, yet must be allowed to have weight when applied to an *absolute* king; for as such an one could in no state long support himself without the aid of some powerful body whose interests were allied to his, so where the standing army is not sufficient to enforce the people's subjection, the assistance of a hierarchy connected with the crown has been found of admirable use; and all must acknowledge that none was ever constituted so expressly for this purpose as the church of England, improved

improved by placing the king, instead of the pope, at its head. A comparison has more than once been made between the three principal forms of church government, as they naturally allied themselves with different civil governments; and it has been said, that popery is particularly suited to the genius of absolute monarchy, the English church to that of mixed monarchy, and the presbyterian to that of a republic. But it is upon a very trifling analogy that this scale is formed; for by what sound reasoning can it be shewn, that a priesthood professing unlimited obedience to a foreign prelate, independent of and superior to all local sovereigns, is more likely to become the satellites of regal authority, than another, which acknowledges their king for their sole head, and receives from him alone all the honours and dignities attached to their order?

It is true, that the great body of our inferior clergy, whose expectations are very limited, and who are chiefly influenced either by gratitude to those individuals who have already patronized them, or by the hope of future favours from similar sources, are little affected by *this* cause of attachment to the crown: and as in this country the temporal interests of the clergy are happily blended with those of the laity, it may be supposed that they will (as far as they can rise above professional prejudices) be as sensible of the benefits of a free constitution, as their fellow-subjects. And with pleasure I acknowledge, that some clergymen of *this description* have stood forth as the warmest advocates

advocates for liberty. But in making this confession, I have a right to assume it as an unanswerable reply to the suspicions entertained of the Dissenters as favourers of republicanism. For if it be true, that our mixed government is by experience proved to be the best possible, not a single reason can be suggested why *they* should wish to change it, who can have no interest whatsoever distinct from that of their country. All their habits, all their earliest associations are in favour of limited monarchy; and they have no motive even to controul or diminish the regal prerogatives, unless as far as they have been found injurious to the public welfare. But after a majority of the representatives of the nation have declared the power of the crown too great, it can surely be no imputation on any individuals to profess the same opinion. I am not now, however, writing an apology for a body of men who need none;—let those prepare apologies who are conscious of being just objects of suspicion from their principles or conduct.

Various, and I trust weighty, arguments have above been adduced to prove that the church of England, by its constitution, must in general be subservient to the interests of the monarchical part of our government. It remains only to confirm them by appeals to fact. The person before alluded to as the most determined opposer of the Dissenters' claims, is said in his speech to have ventured upon a like appeal, for proof of the necessary connection between church and state, and that the prosperity
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of the one ever accompanied that of the other. That under the protection of the state, as rendered firm and flourishing by the principles of equitable government, the church has lived in peace and plenty, will readily be granted; and so far a consent in the prosperity of both may truly be asserted; but that the leading principles of the one have been all in union with those of the other—that they have in the least co-operated towards that establishment of public affairs which now, I hope, a great majority of Englishmen think a happy one, is loudly contradicted by the whole tenor of English history.

To begin with the restoration ——— does not the church reckon among her golden days the reign of that unprincipled profligate Charles the second, and did she not constantly abet all those tyrannical maxims and designs which repeatedly brought the constitution to the brink of ruin? In the succeeding reign the danger to both was common, and for a time inspired common measures for self-preservation, in which even the persecuted Dissenters cordially joined. But even the heroes and martyrs of the church soon showed, that when they resisted attacks upon *their* rights and properties, they had no idea of extending that principle of resistance to the effectual security of the constitution, still less to any advantage for the cause of liberty. The glorious revolution itself has never, even to the present day, been regarded by high churchmen in any other light than as a dubious measure, only justifiable from the dangers of the church, and by no means

means to be proposed as an example for future times, to be pleaded as a decision of the constitution in favour of the rights of the people. The late centenary celebration of this event sufficiently discovered how little the staunch friends of the church wished to re-kindle the lamp of liberty from such a light. In the last years of queen Ann the church triumphed, and the friends of freedom trembled. The accession of the Brunswick family was a blow to the high-church party which they most sensibly felt; and the fanatic cry of *the danger of the church* was the consequence of the security of the state. Such was the prevalence of disaffection among the established clergy, that I hesitate not to assert, that at least two thirds of the whole body, after the period of the rebellion in 1745, regarded as usurpers those sovereigns for whom they bound themselves to offer up a nation's prayers. The church again resisted the crown; but it was only for the purpose of preserving all its prerogatives in their full extent for the *hereditary* monarch, when the *popular* one should be removed. The history of the present reign would not less forcibly confirm the position I have been maintaining; but of transactions so recent it is needless to speak. Such, then, is the boasted conformity between the church of England and the British constitution, that the first has ever apprehended its danger from the measures employed to meliorate and strengthen the second; and the latter has regarded the triumph of the former as the worst of auguries!

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The established church probably comprizes *ninths* of the people of England; but in this number it is to be presumed that there are many who, superior to the narrow views of a sect, and regarding their characters of Englishmen as the first of all social ties, are indifferent to every thing in an ecclesiastical establishment but what conduces to the advancement of religion and morality; and scruple not to oppose every part of its spirit which is hostile to the rights of their fellow-citizens, and the principles of civil liberty. Such a person will probably, from considerations like those which have been here suggested, look with some suspicion on the power and influence of an order, which must ever be a weight in that scale of the constitution which is in most danger of preponderating. He will therefore rejoice that there exists another body, characterized by a resistance to the claims of church authority; and knowing them for the firm friends of freedom, without any interests separate from those of their country, he will not be displeased to see them, in such situations as their rank and abilities may fairly entitle them to, standing forth as the steady opposers of all encroachments on the nation's rights. In this sentiment there will be nothing inconsistent with a regard to the real credit and interest of the church to which, as a religious society, he gives the preference.

R E M A R K S

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T W O L E T T E R S,

ADDRESSED TO THE

D E L E G A T E S

FROM THE SEVERAL

CONGREGATIONS OF PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

WHO MET AT DEVIZES, ON SEPT. 14, 1789.

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R E M A R K S

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TWO LETTERS, &c.

Introduction.

It is always an advantage to a good cause to be fully discussed. Its friends, therefore, are under a moral obligation to those of its enemies who oppose it openly, and produce before the public whatever they imagine to be unfavourable to it. Whereas arguments which are kept out of sight, and yet are supposed to exist, will by many be thought to have more weight than they really have; especially if they be in the breasts of men who have acquired a character for their sense and understanding. Because it will be taken for granted, that sensible men will not be influenced by weak or foolish reasons.

The Dissenters are therefore much obliged to the author of the above-mentioned *Letters*, who has been supposed to be the Bishop of Salisbury, for thus openly avowing what he thought to be a sufficient answer

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to all the pleas of the Dissenters for the abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts. And he writes with so much apparent self-satisfaction, that it is evident he entertained no suspicion of the weakness of his arguments; and I dare say will be surprized at any appearance of strength in this reply to them. His confidence, however, is the offspring of such extreme ignorance, and such a total unacquaintedness with the subject on which he writes, that I cannot persuade myself that these Letters are the production of Bishop Barrington, who, being the son of a steady and learned Dissenter, must surely know something more of their principles than this writer appears to do. For it is evident that he had neither read nor thought upon the subject, as I have no doubt of shewing, if not to the satisfaction of himself, at least to that of all impartial readers.

I therefore conclude from appearances, that these Letters were written by some clergyman who was never acquainted with any Dissenters, or had read any of their writings; and when persons will presume to write without reading any thing except on one side of the question, and without conversing with any body who could inform them better, they cannot but expose the cause they mean to serve. Every thing that this writer has advanced admits of an easy a reply, that a child may be made to see the force of it.

But, indeed, it can hardly be supposed not only that a bishop, or clergyman, but even that any christian

ian, of the present age, can be so ignorant as this writer is of the distinction of sects among christians. "Would you," says he*, "have him," i. e. the chief magistrate, "be to-day an Athanasian, to-morrow an Arian, then a Socinian, then an Unitarian, &c." as if all *Unitarians* were not either *Arians* or *Socinians*, but a set of christians totally distinct from both.

SECTION I.

Of the Dissenters not having a Right to complain of not being appointed to Offices, to fill which no Person can pretend to have a Right.

DISSENTERS, says this wonderful reasoner†, have no right to complain, because appointments to offices are matters of choice in the elector, not of right in the elected. "You have no ground," says, "to complain that you are deprived of your rights and privileges in being kept out of them; for you never had a right or privilege, independent of choice exercised by others, to get into those offices."

But certainly there is cause of complaint if a man not *eligible* to offices; to which others are

* Letter II. p. 9.

† Letter I. p. 15.

eligible, though he cannot complain of not being actually *elected*; because this is a difference in his *situation* to his disadvantage, and consequently the law that makes the difference is a *partial* one. We do not require that the king should call any particular Dissenters into offices of trust or power, but that, if he should think proper to chuse them, his choice should be valid. What we plead for, therefore, is, in fact, both the enlarging of the king's power of chusing, and our own privilege of being the objects of his choice. And if "the chief magistrate," as this writer says*, "is bound to cherish those who have devoted their abilities, and their fortunes, to the public service, in confidence of public protection," the Dissenters have a peculiar claim to his favour. For no body of men ever stood forth, at the risk of their lives and fortunes, in defence of the constitution of this country, when it was subverted by James II. nor was any set of men so zealous for the revolution, or such steady friends to the princes of the Brunswick line, as the Dissenters.

It may, perhaps, assist this writer to understand me a little better, if, instead of his case of the Dissenters, I put another exactly like it. Supposing a law should be made to incapacitate all who had been educated at any particular college in Oxford or Cambridge from being bishops, would not every person educated in that college have reason to complain of partiality and injustice; though, if that law

* Letter I. p. 12.

had never been made, none of them might actually have been made bishops. It is not the *not being elected*, but the *not being eligible*, to certain offices that we complain of. But this curious reasoner (I hope not bishop Barrington) was not able to perceive any difference between these two very different things.

SECTION II.

Of the Dissenters incapacitating themselves for civil Offices.

THIS profound reasoner farther says*, that the Dissenters have no reason to complain of incapacitation for civil offices, because by chusing to be Dissenters they incapacitate themselves. "It is not," he says, "a fair insinuation that you are incapacitated from holding offices of trust, honour, and emolument, by government. The incapacity originates from yourselves, and rests with you.—Suppose a priest of the established church should wish to exercise some trade, or to represent a borough or county. The law forbids a priest to become a farmer, merchant, or manufacturer; it forbids also a priest (though

* Letter I. p. 6.

“not a deacon) to sit in the house of commons,
 “because he is incapacitated by his orders, but the
 “incapacity was his own voluntary act. He has
 “therefore no just cause to complain.—You
 “chuse to maintain principles which do not accord
 “with one part of the government, and govern-
 “ment does not think it expedient to encourage
 “those your principles. You therefore voluntarily
 “incapacitate yourselves for receiving favours of
 “government, and thence complain without real
 “ground.”

As this writer is rather slow of apprehension, and
 does not readily *distinguish things that differ*, I shall
 put another case, but exactly similar to his own. He
 is not, I dare say, aware of it; but a heathen persecutor
 of christians might have defended his conduct
 upon the same principles, and have adopted the
 same language. He who tolerated none but heathens
 might say to the christians, “Gentlemen, I am
 “sorry that I cannot allow you your lives or your
 “liberty; but you have nothing to complain of.
 “You know the laws, that christians are doomed to
 “the stake, or the mines. Why, therefore, will
 “you chuse to come under that description of men?
 “You chuse to maintain principles which do not
 “accord with the government, and government
 “does not think it expedient to encourage those
 “your principles. You therefore voluntarily inca-
 “pacitate yourselves for receiving any favour, and
 “your complaint is without real ground.”

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But is not this language a cruel insult upon men whose judgment and consciences will not allow them to think or act otherwise than they do, as christians, or dissenters; and whose principles would not lead them to disturb others in judging or acting as they may think proper. This method of reasoning is no proof of the writer being himself a man of principle and conscience; for such persons will have some respect for the principles and consciences of others. I would not therefore depend upon him for acting as he says he should *, if the present establishment be overturned, viz. that he would join some sect of dissenters. I rather think that he would be with every establishment, *as such*.

This writer never considered that every argument which he puts in favour of a protestant civil governor, would apply equally well to the case of a catholic one, or of an heathen emperor before the time of Constantine. I will also suggest to him, what I dare say never once occurred to his own thoughts; that if christianity supported itself, and even prevailed against all opposition for three hundred years, without any civil establishment at all, it may well be trusted to itself now. It's having recourse to the aid of the civil magistrate at this day, is like a man full grown taking to such leading strings as he had never used when he was an infant. Or it is supposing christianity to be grown old and infirm, which is certainly an unjust reflection upon it, and such as none of its friends would make, or insinuate.

* Letter II. p. 43.

SECTION III.

Of Danger to the State from employing Sectaries.

THIS writer has no idea of government employing persons of different religions, but by giving each of them in their turn, and for the time, great influence in the state. "Now, as in this country," says he*, "there must be a chief magistrate, and as that chief magistrate will naturally wish to pay religious worship, he must necessarily join himself to some one or other of the twenty sects. Or would you have him go by alternate weeks to each of the sects? Would you have him be to-day an Athanasian, to-morrow an Arian, then a Socinian, then an Unitarian, and so on by rotation? He must then chuse his sect, and to the sect thus chosen he can but be partial." On these principles this writer infers the certain prevalence of the sect to which the chief magistrate is attached.

But this apprehension of danger to the state from the zeal of each sectary employed in civil offices is either affected, or ridiculous. It is well known that men who court such offices, whatever be their religion, have seldom much zeal for it. Or, ad-

* Letter II. p. 9.

mitting that they had, if all were employed alike, and in proportion to their numbers there would always be the same overbalance of officers belonging to the established religion, which would be sufficient to counteract the attempts of their brother officers of all the different sects, especially as these would, of course, be divided among themselves.

If, for example, there should be an hundred officers belonging to the established church, and ten, or even twenty, of half a dozen different sects; what is it that could be apprehended from them? In fact, much less than now. Because at present, all Dissenters have a principle of union among themselves, in their common exclusion from civil offices, which would not then exist. All would rather be disposed to pay their court to the chief magistrate, who had the power of disposing of what he wished to obtain, which would naturally give him a bias in favour of his religion, viz. that of the state. Consequently, the present system is an impolitic one, if the *safety of the church* be the object; and on this principle very many Dissenters prefer their present situation to that which they would be in after the repeal of the acts in question. Admission to offices at the nomination of the court would, they naturally say, dispose them to favour the court, and become less zealous as Dissenters.

SECTION

SECTION IV.

Of the Dissenters being Enemies to the Constitution.

THIS writer dwells much*, on the hackneyed argument of Dissenters being enemies to the constitution, because it consists of *two parts*, inseparably united, and the Dissenters are the avowed enemies of one part of it. "It seems," he says, "to have escaped your recollection that the government of this country is of a two-fold nature, civil and ecclesiastical. Now though you are assuredly well affected to the civil, yet you certainly are dissatisfied with the ecclesiastical government. The very term by which you are pleased to call yourselves implies thus much. But, Gentlemen, if you disapprove of the ecclesiastical government, you do entertain principles inconsistent with the welfare of the present government. For its welfare depends upon this fundamental principle, that church and state should be inseparably united. You deny this, which to our apprehension is a rational doctrine."

If the welfare of the present government absolutely requires that every thing belonging to it should continue to be as it now is, every person who endeavours to procure any alteration, for the better or the worse, is an enemy to it; and

* Letter I. p. 2.

as every law is a part of the constitution, and these laws may be arranged under a variety of different heads, the constitution may be said to consist not of two only, but of many parts; so that a change in any law, as those relating to the administration of justice, the disposal of property, the punishment of crimes, &c. may be said to affect *the constitution*. If the *clergy* complain of any new law by which *they* are aggrieved, and call it a breach of the constitution, other classes of men, as *physicians, lawyers, &c.* have the same right to complain of any regulation by which *they* should be injured; and may, with the very same reasons, say, that the constitution, or that part of it by which their rights are guarded, is violated by the change. But the only question to an enlightened statesman is, whether a greater good would not result to the whole community from such a change, or whether a greater number of persons would not be benefited, than injured by it.

If, therefore, the ecclesiastical part of the constitution, by which a part of the community is benefited, be no improvement of the civil constitution, in which all are equally interested; and if it might be altered for the advantage of the civil constitution, the person who proposes such an alteration is no enemy, but a friend to his country.

For the church to put itself, as it is apt to do, upon a level with the state, or the whole of the civil constitution of this country, is indeed most impertinent and absurd. For the *civil constitution* existed, and main-

maintained itself for ages, independently of any church, and long before the present ecclesiastical system was thought of. Were not our ancestors a brave, and, for their circumstances and times, a well governed people, even before they embraced christianity? Did not the civil constitution continue to improve itself while the church was catholic? Much more closely was the church and state united in those times than they can be said to be at present, and yet a total change was made in the ecclesiastical system by Henry VIII. without any change whatever in the civil constitution, which indeed continued the same during the farther reformation by Edward VI. the restoration of popery under Queen Mary, and the final overthrow of it by Queen Elizabeth.

To the writer of these letters the whole of the history of England seems to be unknown, so that all these facts, which appear upon the very face of it, will probably be new to him. I shall therefore proceed to inform him farther, that Charles I. endeavoured to subvert the civil part of the constitution, without altering the ecclesiastical part. This, however, was overturned by the parliament; and though the civil constitution was changed at the same time, it was in a manner, and upon principles, altogether independent of the change in the hierarchy. After the suppression of kingly power there were many changes in the constitution of the state, without any change whatever in that of the church; and if Charles II. and his profligate court
had

had thought fit, they might have established the presbyterian religion in England, as it now is in Scotland, and the civil government would have remained the same. Is not the civil constitution of Scotland very nearly the same with that of England? Have not the English and the Scots the same king, and the same parliament; and yet their ecclesiastical constitutions are totally different? How then is the one essential to the being, or the well being, of the other?

It is, indeed, most impudent for *the church*, as it most commonly does, to put itself upon a par with *the state*, as if it was one of the *arms*, one of the *legs*, or one of the *eyes*, of the same body; when it is rather a *wart*, or a *wen*, which is indeed part of the body (the same system of blood-vessels and nerves supplying both) but is nevertheless a mere excrescence, and might with little pain, no risque, and much advantage, be cut off from it.

When the church thus places itself on a par with the state, it puts me in mind of Swift's comparison of the apples and the pieces of horse dung swimming down the stream together, and the latter saying, *how we apples swim*. They certainly do swim together, but the apples would be no losers by the absence of such companions.

The hierarchy of this country has always operated in favour of the monarchical part of the constitution, and therefore tends to throw an undue share of power
into

into the hands of the crown; and this must necessarily be the case while men are governed by the views of interest, and the king has the disposal of those preferments which the clergy covet. A man, therefore, who is no friend to the hierarchy, is only so much a greater friend to the republican part of the constitution, or the friend of general liberty.



SECTION V.

Of the Exclusion of Dissenters from Civil offices by the Church on the Principle of Self-defence.

IT is asserted by this sagacious writer*, that
 “ where the public good requires it, the civil
 “ magistrate is bound in duty, and a regard for his
 “ own conservation, to prevent the propagation of
 “ principles not conducive to his government; in
 “ which prevention he acts entirely on the allowed
 “ principle of *self-defence*. Upon this idea it is that
 “ the chief magistrate of this country with-holds
 “ favours from all descriptions of persons who avow
 “ a dissent from the fundamental principles of that
 “ constitution by which he is bound to govern, in
 “ with-holding which favours he acts not contrary
 “ to right; he assumes no right which belongs not

* Letter II. p. 6.

“ properly

“properly to him; since he does no more than
“prevent, not by *punishment*, but through *discou-*
“*agement*, the most lenient method possible, the
“propagation of principles unfriendly to one part
“of the constitution.”

But if this one part of the constitution should prove to be a weak, and apprehensive one, the defence of it may open a door to all persecution. For this will always be more or less severe in proportion to the fears and apprehensions of those who are in power. And it is very possible that if a weak head of this weak part of the constitution should imagine it to be in real danger, he would, as he is bound to defend it, not content himself with *discouragements* and *negative punishments*, when he thought that they would not be sufficient, but would proceed to some more effectual ones, of a *positive* nature, such as the suppression of meeting houses (if, indeed, that can be said to be merely negative) the forbidding the publication of books, and even the acquisition of wealth. For all these things give *power*, and all power in sectaries may be said to be dangerous to the established church. There may be danger in the enjoyment of their liberty, and even of their lives. All sovereigns begin the most destructive hostilities on the pretence of self-defence. But with respect to the church, it should first be considered whether it is worth guarding at so great an expence, at the expence of justice and humanity. Let the state seriously consider whether it cannot do without so very timid and implacable an ally.

SECTION

SECTION VI.

Of the Necessity of an Ecclesiastical Establishment.

THE necessity of a church establishment is argued in these Letters from the idea of all persons wishing for the establishment of their own mode of religion, and the chief magistrate, accordingly, wishing for the establishment of his.

“Man,” says this systematical reasoner*, “is born
 “a religious creature. In every civilized nation
 “either a spiritual or idol deity has worship. Men
 “will meet together to pay that worship. Suppose
 “but twenty met for that purpose: how are they to
 “proceed? Some form must be adopted. But what
 “form? One suggests sacrifice, another prayer, a
 “third austere practices, a fourth singing; and in
 “short each will recommend his own favourite
 “mode. But at this rate all will be confusion. At
 “length then the case will require that all should
 “acquiesce in one form, suggested by some person,
 “who has influence over the rest. In this assembly
 “of but twenty persons may be seen the origin of
 “church establishment, and the necessity for such
 “establishment.”

* Letter II. p. 7.

Certainly,

Certainly, a cause must be defended *at any rate* to require such arguments as these. All the necessity for this establishment, it seems, is to prevent confusion. But where would be the confusion if these twenty people should go quietly to their own homes, and each of them worship God in his own way; or if any of them should not chuse to have any worship at all? On the principle of this writer the civil magistrate might fancy himself to be under a necessity of establishing his own system of *medicine*, or of *philosophy*; because all men are as much led by nature to form opinions on *these* subjects, as on that of *religion*; and we see that they think as differently about them. But might not every man worship his own God, and employ his own priest, or minister, as well as follow his own notions in medicine, and employ his own physician, without disturbing others, or creating any confusion that would call for the interference of the civil magistrate?

If nothing was depending but religious opinions, or religious practices, the peace of society (which is the only concern of the civil magistrate) would no more be endangered by differences on this account, than by any other subject of speculation. If there were no *emoluments* to contend for, no cause of disturbance would exist; so that all the danger arises from circumstances of the magistrate's own creating. If he either favoured any particular sect, nor oppressed any, they would neither disturb one another, nor interfere with him.

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At this day all religions are regarded with an equal eye by the civil government of North America, and there is not the least prospect of any inconvenience whatever arising from this circumstance. Surely for an example as this, which we have been viewing more than a century, might have taught us wisdom. But where *interest* is concerned, precepts and example are equally lost upon us. At present, the state groans under a heavy burden, most unequally laid in the form of *titbes*, merely to create itself an embarrassment; throwing a bone of contention, and a real cause of disturbance, among persons who would otherwise be very quiet, and give us no trouble. Let the civil magistrate only leave every man to provide for himself in matters of religion, as he does with respect to medicine, and they will be more grudge to pay their own ministers, than they do their own physicians; and the state will be at no expence about it. But nations, having been long used to this inconvenient system, come at length to fancy that they cannot do without it, or something of the same nature. In the same manner, if man had been always used to walk on stilts, or with the help of crutches, they might never have thought of any thing but of the choice of different kinds of stilts, or crutches, without ever imagining that they might walk much better without either.

To assist this writer's apprehension I shall give him, and our readers, another example which, being plainer, he may perhaps understand better than the preceding. Whether man be naturally and necessarily

ly, a religious creature, as he calls him, or not, is unquestionably an eating creature. For, with-
out religion, men must eat; and being withal
social creatures, they like to eat in company.
Hence then," our author might say, "the necessity
of some established system of eating, viz. eating the
same things, and at the same times. For what
confusion would arise, if, while some were cla-
morous for beef, some for mutton, and others for
pork, there should be no rule by which their dis-
cordant claims should be decided? Let the chief
magistrate, therefore, consulting, if he think pro-
per, the taste of the majority, as well as his own,
determine what they shall all eat, and when:"
Such is the argument of this advocate for establish-
ments.

On the other hand a Dissenter would say, "Pray,
Sir, is it not much better to leave every man to
his own natural liberty in this business of eating,
to cook his own dinner, and to eat what he
pleases, and when he pleases, either alone, or
with those who, of their own accord, may chuse
to eat with him? Will not the inconvenience
arising from *compulsion* (many persons being ob-
liged to eat what does not agree with them or
when they are not disposed to eat at all, and others
suffering from waiting too long, &c.) be a greater
evil than any that can arise from their difference
of opinion or practice on the subject?"

Now, as little inconvenience would arise from
men being suffered to follow their own notions in
religion,

religion, as in the business of *eating*. If from the beginning they had been left to themselves, and the civil magistrate had never said any thing to them on the subject, they would no more have disturbed one another about their religion, than about their eating. Or if they had been so quarrelsome, disposed would it not be easy for the civil magistrate to keep the peace among them, without considering the subject of religion, but only the natural right that every man has to do whatever he pleases, provided he give no disturbance to others, and the natural right that he also has to a proper satisfaction for whatever he suffers in consequence of such disturbance.

SECTION VII.

Of the State of Ireland with respect to the Test Act.

AS the test act has been repealed in Ireland, though not in England, this writer has found himself obliged to take some notice of this circumstance, so apparently unfavourable to his argument; and the light in which he pleases to view it is not a little curious. But what has been done must be defended. "With regard to Ireland," says he*, "As the

* Letter I. see Note p. 33.

" Catholics

Catholics have a majority of six to one over the Protestants, it is the interest of all Protestants to unite in one common cause against them."

We see, then, that Dissenters have no favour to expect from this avowedly selfish establishment, till it be its interest to avail itself of their aid, against some common enemy. Time was, however, when the church of England did stand in need of the Dissenters. In the time of king James this church, which had cruelly persecuted the Dissenters during several long reigns, finding itself in real danger, did look to the Dissenters for help, and found generous and effectual assistance from them. But when the danger was over, what did they receive in return? All that king William himself, who was with reason the friend of Dissenters, could procure for them, was a scanty toleration, which was opposed by the bishops, and all the high church party.

This church of England might, however, one would think, do some good to others, especially those who had shewn themselves its friends in time of danger, provided only she received *no harm* from it, though she should not receive any positive advantage. Now what harm has the favour she has shewn the Dissenters in Ireland done to herself? Is either the church, or the state, the worse for it; though much more danger was to be apprehended from any indulgence shewn to Dissenters in Ireland, than to those in England, because they are much more numerous in Ireland in proportion to the

the members of the church of England, than they are in this country. I believe they are even the more numerous of the two, and yet by some means or other, *per fas vel nefas*, the church of England remains the established religion of that country, though its adherents are out-numbered both by the Dissenters and the catholics.

In such a situation as this, the church of England cannot pretend to maintain itself on the principle of justice, or equity, but only on that of force and oppression. This writer, however, like all others who write on *general principles*, without thinking of particular *facts*, defends ecclesiastical establishments, as the method of supporting the religion of the majority of any people, as well as that of the magistrate. But in this case the established religion is that of the magistrate only, and of the minority. Is not this then in matters of religion a perfect tyranny, the whole state being compelled to maintain the religion of a few, out of the public funds, which should be applied to some general benefit. It is probable that in Ireland the members of the church of England are not more than one in ten of all the inhabitants; so that the *nine* are compelled to support the religion of the *tenth man*, besides being at the expence of supporting their own. This state of things being perfectly singular, nothing of the kind existing in any other part of the world, is certainly most unnatural, and so much in the face of all de-

* Letter II. p. 10.

curacy and common sense, that, surely, it cannot be continued long. The sense and spirit of mankind must revolt at it. A serious remonstrance from that nation would, no doubt, procure relief from so manifest a grievance.

SECTION VIII.

Of the Policy of the Church of England with Respect to the Measure proposed.

IF experience could teach this writer, and the advocates for his church, any thing, they might make themselves very easy about the consequences of granting such a favour (if it be right to call it a favour) as the Dissenters are now soliciting. To say nothing of the *toleration act*, from which the church dreaded so much, and suffered so little; when the dissenting ministers applied to be relieved from the obligation which that act of toleration left them under, to subscribe the greater part of the articles of the church of England, the friends of that church took the very same alarm that they now do; and had it not happened that the court was at that time disposed to grant some favour to the catholics, and found that they could not decently do it without granting something to the Protestant Dissenters also,

we

we should not have obtained even *that*. The ministry, however, thinking it politic to grant us that favour, the bishops and the clergy acceded of course, and then the same thing that in one session of parliament had been violently exclaimed against, as highly improper, and dangerous both to church and state, became at once a matter of indifference, and perfectly reasonable, and as such it was then readily granted.

Now, has the state, or the church, found any reason to repent of their conduct? It soon appeared that their apprehensions of danger had no foundation. The advocates for the establishment having found their fears to have been vain on that occasion, might suspect them to be so now. Nay, if they were not blind to their own interest, they might see that their church would stand even firmer after the repeal of the acts by which we are aggrieved, than it does now; because it will then have fewer enemies, and yet all its emoluments would still be its own exclusive property, as much as they are at present.

This is not, in reality, a contest between the Dissenters and the church of England, but between the Dissenters and the *moderate churchmen* on one side, and those who are called *high churchmen* on the other, persons who, from mere bigotry, and a blind inveterate antipathy, which is a disgrace to men pretending to reason or religion, wish at all events to keep the Dissenters as low as possible; who, if it was in their power, would even now repeal every

law

law that has been made in their favour, and subject them to the enormous fines and dreadful imprisonments to which they were subject in the reigns of their darling family the Stuarts. At this spirit the true friends of the establishment are as much shocked as the Dissenters themselves, and they feel themselves disgraced by such associates. For though they all class together as *churchmen*, they are more opposite to one another than churchmen in general and Dissenters.

Now, if men were not blinded by passion, they would see that the church is much safer under the conduct of moderate churchmen, who are disposed to grant the Dissenters every reasonable indulgence, than under that of the high-churchmen, who envy them every thing. For while men are kept in good humour, they are naturally disposed to be easy under any government, though they should not altogether approve of it; but oppression leads men to examine into the foundation of government. Constant irritation makes men quick-sighted to discover every defect in the system by which they are aggrieved; and a sense of these, together with that of their own injuries, enables them at length to find their redress, and perhaps by the overthrow of the government against which they were not originally disposed to revolt. In fact, therefore, the present contest is so far from being between the Dissenters and the church of England, that it is between the friends and the enemies of that church.

It certainly behoves such a government as that of the church of England (the foundations of which are so very insecure) to adopt this moderate and wise policy. Otherwise, instead of complaining of this or that particular grievance from the establishment, we may promote an enquiry into the nature and uses of *church establishments in general*; and these uses, which is all that can recommend them to a wise nation, are of so doubtful a nature, that I cannot think it is for the interest of the church to have them made the subject of much discussion. *Fas est ab hoste doceri.*

It will not much displease the writer of this piece, if the Dissenters should not obtain their petition. He is even ashamed that they have demeaned themselves by asking so little; that they have not done themselves the credit to state *all* their grievances, and, in conjunction with the Catholics, and all who are equally oppressed by the *penal laws*, boldly demanded *all their rights as men and Englishmen*. This is what the Protestants in France have now done, and that with universal approbation and success. If we be refused, I trust that, like the old Sybil, we shall (now that we are more united and more sensible of the reproachful situation in which we have been so long held) rise in our demands on a future occasion. And the longer our just rights are withheld from us, the more, we may be confident, we shall obtain in the end.

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*Books printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church Yd
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